

JUNE 27, 1974

On the morning that the news broke that the government was going to rescue the cow people, we were shipping the early lambs. In the big corral that leads to the chutes, Two black buzzards spent the day. Any time the dust settled from the sheep work, I could see them landing and taking off, lazily observing the scene.

Without the shadow of the black carrion, drouth lamb shipping is sad enough to make a grand jury flood their chambers with tears. Knotheaded lambs mixed among slipwool ewes are a supreme rangeland depressant. Added reports that the government was going to be dealing the cards in the cow game was sufficient to ruin anyone's day.

As the sheep straggled through the cutting gate, I got to wondering where we were all going to be when the government gets through helping us. Prior protection has been so much help that shoe cobblers in the Shortgrass Country wouldn't accept a pair of boots to patch without the owner showing an affidavit of clear title. Other government programs have taken off so much hide and hair from the herders that had there been any money left a transplant doctor could have got rich.

In about 1955, federal interest in our behalf became so intense to fight the drouth, that if they'd shipped four more bales of rotten hay to save us, the Shortgrass Country would have smelled stronger of mildew than a Florida swamp. Within a year, old boys were being helped into F.H.A. disaster hay loans that entangled their finances to a degree that one of Albert Einstein's equations wouldn't have unscrambled the notes.

Oversupply and lack of demand were fixing to cure the cow wreck. Had the Feds failed to notice our plight, there was going to be a sorting and culling of cattlemen that would have left a top end that would never go broke. The survivors could have been used to solve world economic affairs. The rest of us could have been used as examples to save young folks who catch the cowboy fever. It wouldn't have taken many years for the culls to die off, without any cattle to keep them occupied.

I think the big reason government aid doesn't work is the lenient attitude they take toward their subjects. Over in Russia, the rulers wouldn't ask the supermarkets to please run a special on hamburger. The Russian government would gather up the citizens and tell them to start eating meat or they'd rap so many of them across the nose with the old hammer and sickle that they'd wish the Black Sea was full of beef broth.

I did like the qualifications that were offered for the government loan program. Any type of bonafide livestock or poultry owner who was in distress could be loaned up to a million dollars. The phrase "in distress" is going to make that the broadest program ever to hit the meat raising industry. I was getting tired of hearing "demoralized markets" and "uncontrolled havoc." No doubt about it, the drafter of that plan was a real wordslinger who knew what was going on.

It didn't take much of a cut to make the lambs pay on 55 pounds. I figure the heavy end was right close to the 60 mark. With some shaping up, the lights would have gone a strong 40 pounds. Last year, running on the same ranges, the whole lamb crop weighed over 70, but I didn't appreciate the money near as much as I did this year.

The buzzards are still lingering around the corrals. This morning they were perched on the gate posts leading to the house. Superstitious folks, I suppose, would call it a bad omen. However what's bothering me isn't the omens, it's what can already be seen in the offing.